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ABSTRACT

The possibility that women in positions of leadership need to engage in sex-role appropriate behaviors in order to be effective has been investigated recently. In order to explore whether a sex appropriate, Considerate style helps women to be more influential and effective leaders than a sex inappropriate, Dominant style, 47 mixed-sex groups (N=188) participated in a role-play designed to simulate an organizational decision-making situation. The subjects were graduate students in business administration, members of an introductory Organization Behavior class. The results showed that women with male subordinates were more influential when they employed a Considerate style. No differences were found when subordinates included women as well as men. While the women in this study were highly influential leaders, their groups were not particularly successful in reaching the more creative solutions. This latter result suggests that conflict managment may be a particularly sensitive issue for women in management positions. (Results of analyses of leader influence, leader collaboration, and ratings of leader effectiveness by subordinates and leaders are appended in tables.) (Author/LLL)

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# WOMEN IN LEADERSHIP POSITIONS: A COMPARISON OF CONSIDERATE VS DOMINANT BEHAVIORAL STYLES

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## ABSTRACT

Leader style was varied in this study to explore whether a "sex appropriate" Considerate style helps women to be more influential and effective leaders than a "sex inappropriate" Dominant style. Forty-seven mixed-sex groups participated in a role-play designed to simulate an organizational decision-making situation. Women with male subordinates were more influential when they employed a Considerate style. No differences were found when subordinates included women as well as men. While the women in this study were highly influential leaders, their groups were not particularly successful in reaching the more creative solutions. This latter result is interpreted as suggesting that conflict managment may be a particularly sensitive issue for women in management positions.

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The possibility that women in positions of leadership need to engage in sex-role "appropriate" behaviors in order to be effective has been investigated recently. Complicated and sometimes inconsistent findings have emerged from these investigations. (e.g. Terborg, 1977). This hypothesis, which implicitly suggests that women must avoid "masculine" behavior, is a disturbing one since many of the behaviors which would generally contribute to leader effectiveness are considered masculine. In fact, 2 of the items on the original 60-item Bem Sex-Role Inventory used to assess psychological masculinity were "Acts as a leader" and "Has leadership ability" (Bem, 1974) indicating that leadership per se is viewed as a masculine activity. The study described here tested the hypothesis that women leaders are more effective when they employ sex-appropriate behavior than when they employ sex-inappropriate behavior. Leadership behavior was manipulated in a role-playing situation and leader effectiveness was measured by the actual outcomes achieved and by ratings collected from subordinates in the role-play.

## METHOD

### Problem

Maier's Change-of-Work-Procedures role-play was used. This case presents a situation in which a supervisor (Thompson) meets to discuss a possible change in the work procedures of a 3-person team (Jackson, Walters, and Stevenson) under her supervision. Thompson is given data (presumably from a time-and-motion study) which show that the workers' productivity would increase 20% if they stopped rotating and each stayed in his or her one best position. The workers do not want to stop rotating, however, because of the extreme monotony of their jobs. Thus a conflict episode is created.

While some might object to the context of the role-play, it does provide an opportunity to explore women's leadership behavior in a traditionally male position and one which calls for much tact and skill in influencing. Also, repeated use of this role-play as a teaching device indicates that it creates a highly compelling influence episode for participants.

Two different sets of instructions were used for Thompson, the supervisor, to create the two experimental conditions. In the sex-appropriate "Considerate" condition, Thompson was led to be personally committed to ending rotation, but instructed to view this as a problem to be discussed with her workers. In the sex-inappropriate "Dominant" condition, Thompson was instead instructed to announce the decision to stop rotation and was provided with ideas she might use to "sell" the change to the workers (e.g. that they would be able to make more money).

Two types of leader effectiveness were measured based on the 3 possible outcomes from the group's discussion: success in influencing and success in using the conflict to reach creative solutions. "New" solutions in which workers stop rotation indicate that Thompson was successfully influential. "Old" solutions in which workers continue to rotate as before show a lack of leader influence. "Integrative" solutions in which workers modify their rotation in some way have been viewed as more creative. These latter solutions require a more collaborative problem-solving approach which generally yields greater worker commitment to the solutions making such solutions more effective as well.

Subjects

The subjects were 188 MBA students participating as part of an introductory Organization Behavior course. Of the 47 groups, 18 consisted of 1 woman and 3 men while the other 29 contained 2 women and 2 men. A woman

took the leader's role in all 47 groups.

## RESULTS

Results of analyses of leader influence, leader collaboration, and ratings of leader effectiveness by subordinates and by the leaders themselves are presented in Tables 1 - 4.

Table 1 shows that these women were highly influential regardless of experimental condition. The hypothesis that sex-appropriate behavior leads to greater influence was confirmed, but only for women leaders with exclusively male subordinates. No effect for leader behavior was found when subordinates included men and women. No effect was found for leader behavior on collaboration, but there was an extremely low incidence of creative solutions (see Table 2) compared to previous research using the identical roles with mixed-sex groups (Hoffman, Harberg, & Maier, 1962). This earlier study contrasted the effects of worker commitment to rotation upon group problem-solving effectiveness. Hoffman et al.'s results showed that when the workers were strongly committed, the number of Integrative solutions increased, especially in mixed-sex groups (56% Integrative solutions, 6% New solutions). When the workers were not strongly committed there were more New solutions (56% New solutions, 25% Integrative solutions). A comparison of results from these two studies suggests that perhaps the participants in the present study were unwilling to take a strong stand with their female leaders, despite the fact that their roles were identical to those used by Hoffman et al. in their "strongly committed worker" condition.

Table 3 reports worker ratings of Thompson. There were no differences across conditions in ratings of leader effectiveness, in liking for the leader, or in satisfaction with the solutions reached although the mean ratings for satisfaction are low. Participants with Dominant leaders did

report greater resistance to the leader than participants with Considerate leaders, however. Mean "acceptance of leader idea" scores are low for both conditions suggesting that participants may in fact have played their parts strongly. Table 4 shows that this resistance was felt by the leaders in the Dominant condition. Had such resistance been active, there ought to have been more Old and Integrative solutions as the workers argued strongly for retention of rotation. The high proportion of New solutions, especially in the Considerate condition, may indicate a passive resistance on the part of those in subordinate roles. Participants may have withheld information or withdrawn from active participation thereby precluding the possibility of collaborative problem-solving with their female leaders.

## DISCUSSION

The results from this study suggest that maintenance of sex-appropriate behavior by women in leadership roles may be necessary when a woman's subordinates are exclusively men. Given the distribution of men and women in organizations, this situation may be especially likely to occur as women move up the organizational hierarchy.

The extremely low percentage of creative solutions achieved by these groups under women's leadership suggests that conflict management may be a particular problem area for women in supervisory roles. The data do not clearly indicate whether the problem is one of increasing women's skills in collaborative problem-solving, helping subordinates work through their resistance to having a woman in authority, or a combination of both.

While these results can only be viewed as tentative given the methodological constraints of this study, they raise issues which deserve further investigation and elaboration.

## REFERENCES


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TABLE 1

PROPORTION OF INFLUENTIAL LEADERS IN EACH LEADERSHIP CONDITION BROKEN DOWN BY GROUP COMPOSITION

| CONDITION | (N) | NO INFLUENCE % | INFLUENCE % |
|---|---|---|---|
| MALE WORKER GROUPS: [b] [e] | | | |
| Considerate Leaders | (8) | 0.0 | 100.0 |
| Dominant Leaders | (10) | 40.0 | 60.0 |
| MIXED SEX-WORKER GROUPS: [c] | | | |
| Considerate Leaders | (14) | 28.5 | 71.5 |
| Dominant Leaders | (15) | 33.0 | 67.0 |
| ALL GROUPS [a] [d] | | | |
| Considerate Leaders | (22) | 18.0 | 82.0 |
| Dominant Leaders | (25) | 36.0 | 64.0 |

[a]All Groups: Considerate vs Dominant leader, $\chi^2 = 1.857$, $p<.17$.
[b]All-Male-Worker Groups: Considerate vs Dominant leader, $\chi^2 = 4.114$, $p<.05$.
[c]Mixed-Sex-Worker Groups: Considerate vs Dominant leader, $\chi^2 = 0.077$, n.s.
[d]Test of difference in percentage of influential decisions reached by Dominant vs Considerate leaders, $z = 1.38$, n.s.
[e]Test of difference in percentage of influential decisions reached by Dominant vs Considerate leaders of all Male Worker Groups, $z = 2.11$, $p<.05$.

TABLE 2

PROPORTION OF SOLUTION TYPES IN EACH LEADERSHIP CONDITION
BROKEN DOWN BY GROUP COMPOSITION

| CONDITION | (N) | TYPE OF SOLUTION OLD % | NEW % | INTEGRATIVE % |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| MALE WORKER GROUPS [b] | | | | |
| Considerate Leaders | (8) | 0.0 | 62.5 | 37.5 |
| Dominant Leaders | (10) | 40.0 | 40.0 | 20.0 |
| MIXED-SEX WORKER GROUPS [c] | | | | |
| Considerate Leaders | (14) | 28.5 | 43.0 | 28.5 |
| Dominant Leaders | (15) | 33.0 | 47.0 | 20.0 |
| ALL GROUPS [a] | | | | |
| Considerate Leaders | (22) | 18.0 | 50.0 | 32.0 |
| Dominant Leaders | (25) | 36.0 | 44.0 | 20.0 |

[a]All Groups: Considerate vs Dominant leaders, $\chi^2 = 2.073$, n.s.
[b]All-Male-Worker Groups: Considerate vs Dominant leaders, $\chi^2 = 4.14$, $p < .13$
[c]Mixed-Sex-Worker Groups: Considerate vs Dominant leaders, $\chi^2 = 0.297$, n.s.

TABLE 3

MEAN RESPONSES OF WORKERS TO
POST-EXPERIMENTAL QUESTIONNAIRE[a]

| QUESTIONNAIRE ITEM | | CONSIDERATE LEADER | DOMINANT LEADER | t |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| SATISFACTION WITH SOLUTION | MEAN (S.D.) | 3.59 (1.05) | 3.95 (1.07) | 1.14 |
| WILLINGNESS TO ACCEPT FOREMAN'S IDEAS | MEAN. (S.D.) | 3.52 (1.08) | 2.95 (0.85) | 2.02* |
| THOMPSON's EFFECTIVENESS AS A LEADER | MEAN (S.D.) | 4.02 (1.13) | 3.79 (0.90) | 0.76 |
| DEGREE OF LIKING FOR THOMPSON | MEAN (S.D.) | 4.36 (0.67) | 4.34 (0.79) | 0.08 |

[a]SCALE:1= Very dissatisfied, unwilling, etc.
6= Very satisfied, willing, etc.

*$p < .05$

TABLE 4

MEAN LEADER RESPONSES TO
POST-EXPERIMENTAL QUESTIONAIRE[a]

| QUESTIONNAIRE ITEM | | CONSIDERATE LEADER | DOMINANT LEADER | t |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| SATISFACTION WITH SOLUTION | MEAN | 4.68 | 3.96 | |
| | (S.D.) | (1.36) | (1.46) | 1.74* |
| WILLINGNESS OF WORKERS TO ACCEPT YOUR IDEAS | MEAN | 3.78 | 2.92 | |
| | (S.D.) | (1.38) | (1.38) | 2.10** |
| COMMITMENT TO NEW SOLUTION | MEAN | 2.91 | 2.96 | |
| | (S.D.) | (1.31) | (1.40) | 0.12 |
| DEGREE OF LIKING FOR WORKERS | MEAN | 5.09 | 4.92 | |
| | (S.D.) | (0.52) | (0.77) | 0.88 |
| COMFORT BEING FOREMAN | MEAN | 3.47 | 3.58 | |
| | (S.D.) | (1.61) | (1.53) | 0.23 |

[a]SCALE: 1 = Very dissatisfied, unwilling, etc.
6 = Very satisfied, willing, etc.

*p<.10
**p<.05